



Challenging the Classical Epistemology

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Agenda

- ⌘ PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism
 - ⇒ Alasdair MacINTYRE: *Relativism, Power & Philosophy*

- ⌘ PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements
 - ⇒ Paul RICOEUR: *On Interpretation*

- ⌘ PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research
 - ⇒ Raza MIR & Andrew WATSON: *Strategic Management and the Philosophy of Science: The Case for a Constructivist Methodology*

- ⌘ PART 4: Why & How Should we Overcome Epistemology ?
 - ⇒ Charles TAYLOR: *Overcoming Epistemology*

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

- ⌘ Objective: Challenging relativism
- ⌘ How ?
 - ⌘ No attempt to show that it is always irrational
 - ⌘ Introduces the relativistic predicament
- ⌘ Doctrines are not always susceptible of genuine refutation:
 - ⌘ Existing rational justification
 - ⌘ Presentation of a moment in the development of thought that has to be transcended
 - => Need to understand what can be said in favour

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

1. What is relativism ?

⌘ Sophist Prptagoras (PLATO): “The way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me; and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you”
(Theatetus 152a)

⇒ No such thing as falsehood

⌘ KANT

⌘ Philosophy ~ unable to prove that reality as we perceive it is actually real

⌘ Scheme/content dualism

“Thoughts without content are empty: intuitions without concepts are blind”

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

2. Challenges to relativism

- ⌘ PLATO: “Turning the Tables argument”
 - ⌘ “If the way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me, and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you, then it appears to me that your whole doctrine is false”.
 - ⇒ Anything that appears to me ~ true : must be true that Protagoras is wrong
 - ⌘ Relativism ~ not able to deny the truth of its own contradiction
 - ⌘ “is true” vs. “seems true to such & such persons”

- ⌘ HEGEL: critique of Kant

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

3. Macintyre's point of view: the relativistic predicament

- ρ Relativism ~ rational response in some specific situations
 - ρ Inter-connected with ordinary agents and language users
 - ρ Characteristic of philosophical problems
- ρ Discussion of Translation
 - ρ Rival traditions ~ Different languages
 - ρ incommensurability vs. untranslatability
 - ρ embodied in & intimately intertwined with rival languages
 - ρ Why ? => How systems of reference work in different languages
 - ρ Modernity: reference relation supposed empty
 - ρ True communities: pre-commitment to a system of belief
 - ρ Ex: Londonderry vs. Doire Colmcille (St Columba's Oak Grove)

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

3. MacIntyre's point of view: the relativistic predicament

- ⌘ Discussion of Translation
 - ⌘ Problem when translating
 - ⌘ Not possible: "my means of gloss & paraphrase"
 - ⌘ "the outcome [...] of rendering those beliefs sufficiently intelligible to be evaluated by a member of the other community involves characterizing those beliefs in such a way that they are bound to be rejected"
 - ⌘ Rationality of belief in no possible adjudication between different conceptual systems ~ rationality of relativism
 - ⌘ One available language: not rational
 - ⌘ Person "in a certain type of frontier or boundary situation"
 - ⌘ Imposed language of an alien culture : the case of children
 - ⌘ 2 languages & 2 incommensurable traditions

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

3. MacIntyre's point of view: the relativistic predicament

- ⌞ Rationality of belief in no possible adjudication between different conceptual systems ~ rationality of relativism
 - ⌞ Person "in a certain type of frontier or boundary situation"
 - ⌞ Impossible choice: choice of standards vs. choice guided by standards
 - ⌞ Only rational position ~ relativist one

- ⌞ Irrationality of relativism for moral enquirers confronted with 2 or more incommensurable tradition
 - ⌞ 2 language based on 2 systems of beliefs: unable to provide a representation of each other without exhibiting the rival as irrational
 - ⌞ Language of modernity ~ removes all possibility of languages to justify themselves (no context)
 - ⌞ To transcend relativism: learn a 3rd language from those who drove philosophical progress
 - => Alternative & rival modes of justification but debate focused & determinate

PART 1: The Relativity of Relativism

3. MacIntyre's point of view: the relativistic predicament

p Discussion

p No solution for us, today

p No demonstration that we should not be relativists

p No showing of how it is possible to cease being relativists

p Proposed solution:

p Cultures could be different...

p Speak an earlier version of the languages most of us speak

p We need a more limited range of canonical texts but

p How to reduce?

p On which criteria? Only candidate from a tradition-bound rationality but such a rationality is the goal, not the starting point

=> Hermeneutic circle

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

1. Inquiring the narrative function: what is storytelling ?

- ⌞ 3 major preoccupations
 - ⌞ Preserving the fullness, the diversity & the irreducibility of the various uses of language
 - ⌞ Gathering together the diverse forms & modes of storytelling: no real distinction between:
 - ⌞ Narratives of descriptive forms (sciences)
 - ⌞ Fictional narratives
 - ⌞ Functional unity: temporality
 - ⌞ Testing the selective & organizational capacity of language in texts
- ⌞ Story making ~ verbal composition = notion of plot
 - ⌞ Arrangement of events & actions recounted to make a story “complete a entire”
 - ⌞ Beginning action vs. middle action vs. end action
 - ⌞ Intelligibility: plot ~ mediator between the event & the story

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

2. History vs. Litterature

- ⌞ Thesis:
 - ⌞ History & narrative are connected
 - ⌞ Necessary for History to be specific among the social sciences
- ⌞ Before: chronicles ~ narratives with political stance
- ⌞ Modern History:
 - ⌞ Change in themes: social, economic, cultural & spiritual
 - ⌞ No more chronological order
 - ⌞ Change in methods: No more telling stories, but close to nomological sciences
 - ⌞ Should not be subjective

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

2. History vs. Litterature

- ⌞ Limits of modern assumptions regarding History
 - ⌞ History still tells stories:
 - ⌞ Still tied to time
 - ⌞ Still accounts for the changes that link a terminal to an initial situation: tied to human action (plot)
 - ⌞ History does not rely so much on nomological assumptions
 - ⌞ Intelligibility of the plot
 - ⌞ More explanation leads to better recounting
 - ⌞ Narratives are not that subjective
 - ⌞ Intelligibility of the plot
 - ⌞ Distance introduced by narratives between itself & lived experience: “life is lived, history is recounted”

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

2. History vs. Literature

- ⌞ Reference to temporal human experience
 - ⌞ History ~ reality (past) vs. narrative ~ fiction
 - ⌞ The historian speaks of the absent past in terms of fiction
 - ⌞ The novelist speaks of what is unreal as if it had taken place

- ⌞ History & Interpretation
 - ⌞ Past reality: unverifiable => indirect grasp
 - ⌞ Reconstruction of the past via work of imagination
 - ⌞ Combination of narrative coherence (plot) with conformity to the documents

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

3. Immanent “sense” of the statements

- ⌞ Narrative & metaphorical statements
 - ⌞ Belonging to discourse
 - ⌞ Metaphorical statement: work on language & attribution to logical subjects of predicates at first glance incompatible with them
- ⌞ Theory of metaphor vs. theory of narrative
 - ⌞ Phenomena of innovation
 - ⌞ Living metaphor ~ new relevance in predication
 - ⌞ Narrative: wholly invented plot

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

3. Immanent “sense” of the statements

- ⌞ Privileged role
 - ⌞ Productive imagination
 - ⌞ Schematism

- ⌞ Intelligible character of semantic innovation
 - ⌞ Relation between understanding & explanation
 - ⌞ Repeat the discursive operation
 - ⌞ Go back to signs

PART 2: History, Narratives & Hermeneutical Interpretation of Statements

4. Elucidating the reference problem

- ρ Reference ~ claim to an extra linguistic reality
- ρ Narrative fiction imitates human action & remakes reality via plot
 - ρ World of text within world of action: transfiguration
- ρ Poetic function of the metaphor
 - ρ Message per se
 - ρ Concealed referential function of discourse: re-description of a reality inaccessible to direct description
 - ρ World fully accessible
- ρ Solutions: hermeneutics
 - ρ Mediation by signs
 - ρ Mediation by symbols
 - ρ Mediation by texts

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

1. What is realism ?

- ⌘ “things exist independently of their being theorized or experienced”
- ⌘ “unobservable phenomena may be considered valid as long as they explain the existence or continuation of observable phenomena”
- ⌘ Assumptions:
 - ⌘ Best theories ~ close to the truth
 - ⌘ Predictive validity of a theory explained by its truth
 - ⌘ Move towards a true account of phenomena
 - ⌘ Claims are either true or false
 - ⌘ ‘reason’ is the key to prove if a theory is true or false

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

2. What is constructivism ?

- ⌘ “research is fundamentally theory-dependant”
- ⌘ “the theoretical position held by researchers [...] determines what gets construed as a research problem, what theoretical procedures are used, and what constitutes observations and evidence”
- ⌘ Assumptions (nonpositivist):
 - ⌘ Knowledge is theory-driven
 - ⌘ Impossible separation of the researcher and the phenomena under investigation
 - ⌘ Impossible separation between theory & practice
 - ⌘ Researchers are never ‘objective’ or value-neutral
 - ⌘ Conversations within the research community based on shared assumptions
 - ⌘ Constructivism ~ methodology

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

2. What is constructivism ?

- ⌘ Subsets: radical, physical, evolutionary, postmodern, social & information processing
- ⌘ Thomas KUHN
- ⌘ Real question: Is it possible to understand phenomena without a specific theory of knowledge...

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

3. Why taking a constructivist approach in strategy research ?

- ⌘ Context-driven nature of strategic management research
- ⌘ Strategy researchers & managers as actors rather than information processors or reactors
 - ⌘ Generation of elements in the environment
 - ⌘ Organizational routines, rhetorical devices, shared values & ceremonies
- ⌘ Limits of realism in not considering the socially constructed aspects of strategy:
 - ⌘ Theories are a measure of “the reality out there” and not a product of their authors’ imagination
 - ⌘ Totalization of subgroups’ points of view as organizational ‘reality’
 - ⌘ Attempt to give an objective character to the accounts => researchers write their presence completely out of the research

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

3. What for & How ?

- ⌘ Suitable techniques:
 - ⌘ Ethnography
 - ⌘ Institutional analysis
 - ⌘ Textual analysis
 - ⌘ Appreciative inquiry
 - ⌘ Historical analysis: bringing back the issue of context + more effective strategic research
- ⌘ Constructivist perspective at the level of assumption, not at the level of technique
 - ⌘ A way of conducting research into a phenomena, not taking a definitive perspective on the phenomena
- ⌘ Linking micro phenomenon to a macro phenomenon

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

3. What for & How ?

- ρ Benefits:
 - ρ More focused applicability
 - ρ Overgeneralization avoided

PART 3: Constructivism vs. Realism in Business Research

Conclusion

- ⌘ Mix of realism & constructivism
 - ⌘ To understand the context-driven nature of strategy
 - ⌘ Link between organizational realities and larger social systems
 - ⌘ Discover conditions under which strategy research transferrable across time & space

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

1. What does it mean to overcome epistemology ?

- ⌘ Abandoning foundationalism ~ Platonic metaphysical outlook that believes in pre-existing, objective transcendentals, such as Forms (actual events/objects are flawed examples/instances of ideal Forms)
- ⌘ Challenging the Representational View ~ knowledge as a correct representation of an independent reality

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

2. Modern age & the Representational View

- ⌘ Link between the representational view & the new mechanistic science of the XVIIth century

 - ⌘ Irrelevance of Aristotle's understanding of knowledge
 - ⌘ Attempts to explain our knowing in mechanistic terms => perception
- ⌘ "If Plato or Aristotle were right, the road to certainty could not be inward – indeed, the very notion of certainty would be different: defined more in terms of the kinds of being that admit of it"

 - ⌘ Existence of transcendentals (justice, goodness...) => "good" action would replicate or actualize an instance of the Form. Authority not personal ("my choice"/inward/subjective): standard objectives & universal. Chief moral virtues = obedience & imitation
 - ⌘ Catholicism in Medieval Times

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

2. Modern age & the Representational View

- ⌞ New ideals of science & new conception of the excellences of thought
 - ⌞ Central to Descartes' philosophy: real knowledge based on reliable method, generalizing self-founded confidence. 'evidence'
 - ⌞ Certainty ~ something the mind has to generate for itself by ordering thoughts correctly: reflexive turn
 - ⌞ "malin génie" vs. veracious God
 - ⌞ Examination of our own ideas in abstraction from what they 'represent'
 - ⌞ Shift with the Protestant Reform
 - ⌞ HUME: focus on the origin of false confidence in our ideas
 - ⌞ HUSSERL: power of a moral ideal of reflexive, self-given certainty
 - ⌞ Idea of "self responsibility"
 - ⌞ Rely on one's own judgement & find one's purpose in oneself

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

2. Modern age & the Representational View

- Modern aspiration to autonomy:
 1. Ideally, subject disengaged (free & rational) from natural & social world
 2. Punctual view of the self
 3. Atomistic construal of society constituted of individual purposes

- Epistemological tradition connected with some of the most important moral and spiritual ideas of the civilisation
 - => Challenging them ~ overcoming epistemology

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. **Some critics of traditional epistemology: KANT; HEIDEGGER, WITTGENSTEIN & MERLEAU-PONTY**
 - ⌞ Motivated by dislike of the moral & spiritual consequences of epistemology
 - ⌞ Strong affinity for some alternative
 - ⌞ Establish new moral outlook & new construals for knowledge
 - ⌞ Shift in the centre of gravity of the starting point: the necessity of experience or awareness of the world beforehand (transcendental condition)
 - ⌞ Problem with empiricist & rationalist epistemologies: ideas self-enclosed & still point towards/represent things in the outside world (“intentionality”)

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. Some critics of traditional epistemology: KANT; HEIDEGGER, WITTGENSTEIN & MERLEAU-PONTY

ρ KANT

- ρ Transcendental condition ~ condition of intentionality
- ρ Atomistic understanding of knowledge (Hume) impossible under these conditions
- ρ Experiences have to be construable as of an object & their being as an object entails a certain relatedness among our “representations”

ρ TAYLOR’s “agent’s knowledge”

- ρ Getting perception and knowledge of the world => possible identification of conditions necessary to show activity as coherent
- ρ Philosophical achievement: define issues properly

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. Some critics of traditional epistemology: KANT; HEIDEGGER, WITTGENSTEIN & MERLEAU-PONTY

- ⌘ HEIDEGGER & MERLEAU-PONTY vs. Disengaged subject
 - ⌘ Condition to achieve disengaged representation of reality ~ struggling with the world & its components / agent realizing a certain form of life
 - ⌘ End of foundationalism:
 - ⌘ Representation of things grounded in the way we deal with them
 - ⌘ Underlying representation of the world ~certain grasp of it, as agents
 - ⌘ My picture of an object & that object vs. my dealing of an object & that object
 - ⌘ “zunächst und zumeist” coping agents
 - ⌘ Impossible total disengagement of the agent: task of reason ~ articulating our background, disclosing what it involves

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. Some critics of traditional epistemology: KANT; HEIDEGGER, WITTGENSTEIN & MERLEAU-PONTY

- ⌞ HEIDEGGER & MERLEAU-PONTY vs. Punctual view of the self
 - ⌞ Background inescapable: understanding of the depth of the agent
 - ⌞ Condition of intentionality:
 - ⌞ HEIDEGGER: Dasein's world defined by the related purposes of a certain way of life shared with others
 - ⌞ MERLEAU-PONTY: agency embodied => locus of direction of action & desires never fully grasped & control by personal decision

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. Some critics of traditional epistemology: KANT; HEIDEGGER, WITTGENSTEIN & MERLEAU-PONTY

- ⌘ Critics to Atomistic construal of society
 - ⌘ Priority of society as locus of individual's identity
 - ⌘ New theory of language ~ speech community
 - ⌘ HEGEL: language indispensable & holistic
 - ⌘ WITTGENSTEIN: uselessness of private ostensive definition & role played by language in identifying an object

PART 4: Why & How Should We Overcome Epistemology

3. Conclusion: Overcoming epistemology...

- ⌞ Gaining insights into some of the crucial anthropological questions underpinning our moral & spiritual beliefs
- ⌞ Awareness about our limits and conditions of our knowing
- ⌞ Need to conceive reason differently
 - ⌞ “disclosure”: ability to articulate our lives’ backgrounds perspicuously
 - ⌞ Irrelevance of instrumental reason
 - ⌞ Irrelevance of punctual notion of the self
- ⌞ A critics to Neo-Nietzscheists
 - ⌞ FOUCAULT: reject of the conception of the punctual self & self potentially self-making
 - ⇒ All choices are arbitrary, without logical justification
 - ⇒ Abandoning philosophy related to reason (including science) & moral truth, which Nietzsche condemns as rationalizing a will-to-power
 - ⇒ HABERMAS: defendant of critical reason & formal understanding of it => procedural ethics